



**Columbus Blue Jackets News Clips
September 5, 2024**

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Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets remember Johnny Gaudreau: 'You were one of a kind and we loved you'

By Brian Hedger- September 5, 2024

After almost a week of grieving, the Blue Jackets are still reeling from the sting of losing Johnny Gaudreau and his brother, Matthew, in a tragic wreck.

Johnny, 31, and Matthew, 29, were killed last Thursday in South Jersey by a suspected drunk driver as they biked together along a road in Oldmans Township — not far from the family's home in Salem County. Their shocking deaths ripped through the hockey world, leaving players, coaches, former teammates, fans and their family all in grief.

Impromptu memorials have sprung up from Calgary to Columbus to Boston to their hometown in South Jersey, all places where Johnny Gaudreau played and Matthew traveled to see him. At Nationwide Arena, dozens of sticks, flowers, pucks, jerseys and handmade signs were left by fans outside the building's East entrance — where a grassroots candlelight vigil held by fans was held the night the tragedy was confirmed.

A team vigil for fans was planned for Wednesday in the same location, after president of hockey operations/general manager Don Waddell and four players — captain Boone Jenner and alternates Erik Gudbranson, Zach Werenski and Sean Kuraly — spoke publicly for the first time since the Gaudreau brothers perished. All wore matching polo shirts with Gaudreau's No. 13 on them while reading statements and choking back tears.

Time will eventually provide healing, but right now the Jackets are gutted as a team and organization.

“It's difficult to find the right words in the face of this heartbreaking and unimaginable tragedy that took the lives of our teammate, John Gaudreau, and his brother, Matty Gaudreau,” Jenner said. “In the past few days, moving through all the emotions — anger, sadness, disbelief and emptiness — I've come to realize how much love I have for John. I'm very honored to be able to speak to what John meant, not only to me, but all his teammates and the positive impact he had on our lives.”

Jenner and Gaudreau had become close after the latter shocked the NHL in July 2022 by leaving Calgary for Columbus as a free agent. They played on the same forward line, the top one, for most of Gaudreau's time with the Blue Jackets and developed a close bond as linemates. Gudbranson was also close with Gaudreau after they'd become friends in Calgary the year before both picked the Blue Jackets.

They drove to games together, knew each other's families like their own and felt like brothers. In fact, that was a recurring theme in all four players' remarks Wednesday. Losing Gaudreau as a teammate is like losing a brother and knowing that his family lost two brothers, two sons, two husbands and two fathers is even more difficult to swallow.

“You've been in our thoughts every second of every day,” Jenner said, addressing the Gaudreau family that's headed up by parents Guy and Jane. “Whenever you met one Gaudreau, it wasn't long after that you were meeting another, and then receiving a bottle of Guy's homemade maple syrup. It was easy to see very quickly how tight knit their family was.”

Gudbranson, whose NHL career was a transient existence before signing a four-year contract with the Blue Jackets, said Gaudreau's friendship meant even more to him because they'd stayed teammates for three years.

“To John, I’ve been lucky to play all around North America, and I’ve been blessed with many amazing teammates,” Gudbranson said. “But within all that movement, I struggled to find a constant connection with many of them. When I moved to Calgary ... I knew it was different.”

Gudbranson said Gaudreau’s antics before games used to drive him “crazy,” and it was all intentionally done — from walking out of his house “seven minutes late,” for rides together to the arena to wearing a hoodie, toque and “10-year old sweatpants” the night before games.

“You were one of a kind, and we loved you,” Gudbranson said, choking up. “And we still do.”

Waddell was also shaken.

Though the Jackets’ new GM just took the job in late May, he knew Gaudreau from stints working with USA Hockey during world tournaments, and was eager to have the star lead his new NHL team’s resurgence.

“In talking with people in the organization, including the guys here with me today, it’s apparent just how special of a person Johnny was, and how significant his loss is being felt by everyone,” Waddell said.

“Where there’s a huge hole in our lineup, there’s even a larger one in our hearts.”

Waddell briefly addressed a topic that neither he nor the rest of the Blue Jackets are ready to talk about.

“I know there are questions related to our team and how we’re going to move forward without Johnny, and the impact his loss will have on our lineup,” Waddell said. “Those questions will be for another day. Our immediate focus is on supporting the Gaudreau family and supporting each other, as we continue to grieve the loss of Johnny and Matthew.”

Part of that support will include attending memorial services for the Gaudreau brothers as a team, whenever they’re held. In the meantime, the Jackets will keep leaning on each other.

“You’ve got four of the (team) leaders right here that are going to play a major role in it,” Waddell said.

“Talking to Boone this weekend, getting the team together, they’re each other’s brothers and these guys will do a tremendous job to help everybody through it.”

Columbus Dispatch / Johnny Gaudreau: Columbus Blue Jackets holding press conference on player's death, next steps for NHL team

By Colin Gay- September 5, 2024

The Columbus Blue Jackets continue to grieve the death of star forward Johnny Gaudreau.

Blue Jackets president of hockey operations and general manager Don Waddell and select players will hold a press conference 1 p.m. Wednesday in the Founders Club at Nationwide Arena.

Gaudreau and his brother, Matthew, were killed Thursday when they were struck by a driver who admitted to New Jersey State Police that he'd been drinking alcohol before the wreck.

Johnny Gaudreau was 31.

Before Wednesday's press conference, the Blue Jackets had only released a team statement immediately after Gaudreau's death was announced.

Many Blue Jackets players posted memorials of Gaudreau on social media shortly after the announcement.

We will have the press conference available to stream live here when it starts.

Columbus Dispatch / Reflecting on Johnny Gaudreau: 5 memorable moments with Columbus Blue Jackets

By Brian Hedger- September 5, 2024

“Johnny Hockey” didn’t get much time to be a Blue Jacket, and the two years that Johnny Gaudreau did play in Columbus were mostly a challenge for the star forward.

After stunning the NHL in July 2022 by signing a seven-year contract with the Blue Jackets, Gaudreau joined a team that quickly became plagued by injuries and had the bottom fall out in two consecutive seasons. It decimated his numbers, which plummeted from a career-best 115 points during his final season with the Calgary Flames, but Gaudreau didn’t go into this summer with a defeatist approach.

He was intent on hitting the offseason hard, focusing on a rebound season that would show the Blue Jackets and their passionate fan base why he was also known as “Johnny Hockey.”

Instead, Gaudreau and his younger brother Matthew were killed last week while biking along a rural road in Oldmans Township, New Jersey, near where they grew up. Just two weeks after turning 31, Gaudreau’s life was cut short by an incident involving a reckless driver who admitted to New Jersey State Police that he’d been drinking alcohol before the wreck.

Gaudreau no longer has a chance to help the Blue Jackets grow into a playoff contender, and the special moments he’d planned to give Columbus are just “what if?” dreams now. Looking back, however, Gaudreau did leave his mark on the Blue Jackets during his time wearing their Union Blue.

Here are five moments to remember from Gaudreau’s time with the Blue Jackets:

‘Johnny Hockey’ picks Columbus Blue Jackets

Before landing Gaudreau on July 13, 2022, former Blue Jackets general manager Jarmo Kekalainen tried to downplay the impact of NHL free agency.

His rebuilding team had just exceeded expectations during former coach Brad Larsen’s first season (2021-22), the Jackets’ hopes were still largely dependent on the maturation of young players and Kekalainen was also trying to work out a contract extension with Patrik Laine, a restricted free agent.

The Jackets, in a lot of ways, weren’t ready to add a star player with a big contract, but they also weren’t in a position to say, “Thanks, but no thanks,” to Johnny Gaudreau. He wanted to join the Blue Jackets, raise his family in Columbus and be close enough to his roots in New Jersey that his family could be on his doorstep with just a half day’s drive.

So, the Blue Jackets extended an offer and he signed it.

After watching Artemi Panarin, Sergei Bobrovsky and Matt Duchene bolt town in 2019 just weeks after helping the Jackets win the lone playoff series in franchise history, Gaudreau’s shocking decision warmed a lot of hearts in Columbus as much as it befuddled the rest of the hockey world.

His arrival in Central Ohio is something that won’t soon be forgotten by the Blue Jackets or local hockey fans.

Johnny Gaudreau gives fans a goal celebration to remember in first home game with Columbus Blue Jackets

After fielding numerous questions throughout training camp and the preseason about signing in Columbus, it didn't take Gaudreau long to make Nationwide Arena's goal cannon fire following his first official goal with the Blue Jackets.

Just 2:21 into the Jackets' home opener, Gaudreau parked in the low slot and fired a shot into the net off a backhand feed from Justin Danforth behind the Tampa Bay Lightning's net. Technically, the puck caromed off Lightning defenseman Victor Hedman and slipped past goalie Andrei Vasilevskiy, but it still counted.

Gaudreau's smile was electric, a packed arena roared to life and the Jackets' newest star gave an emphatic fist pump as he skated toward the wall on the left wing. Tampa Bay won, 5-2, but Gaudreau delivered a special moment in his first home game.

Johnny Gaudreau's beautiful wraparound goal leads Columbus Blue Jackets to victory

The Jackets dropped the first three games of Gaudreau's career with Columbus, but he made sure the skid didn't reach four.

Just 2:27 after Bo Horvat put the Vancouver Canucks up 3-2 at Nationwide Arena, Gaudreau netted a silky-smooth equalizer with a wraparound shot to beat goalie Spencer Martin – who joined the Blue Jackets the following year.

After gathering the puck inside his own blue line, Gaudreau got a head up steam and charged up the ice. He drew Martin over to the outside of the left goal post and then dragged the puck around to the opposite post for a tuck off the goalie's left skate and into the net.

That goal tied it 3-3, forced overtime and defenseman Vladislav Gavrikov won it 3:21 into OT. Gaudreau put his shiftiness, speed, hands and creativity on full display to score his goal – showing why his nickname was "Johnny Hockey."

Columbus Blue Jackets' Kent Johnson wows Johnny Gaudreau with 'Michigan' goal

The Blue Jackets touted a highly regarded rookie forward during Gaudreau's first season in Columbus, and Kent Johnson's playing style must've felt familiar.

Johnson towered over Gaudreau in height but had a wiry build like the Jackets' star plus similar hands and playmaking vision as a passer. One thing Johnson could do that Gaudreau shied from attempting, however, was scoring with a lacrosse shot made famous by Michigan's Mike Legg in a college game.

Johnson had a couple failed attempts at it as a rookie but pulled it off perfectly March 24, 2022 – exactly 27 years to the day Legg first did it for the school where Johnson played for two years prior to starting his NHL career. Johnson's goal put the Jackets up 3-2 late in the second period against the New York Islanders, and Gaudreau was more than a little impressed.

Watching the play unfold from the bench, he quickly covered his mouth with his right hand, looked at his teammates and shook his head while smiling in disbelief. It was one of most memorable moments for the Blue Jackets and Gaudreau during an otherwise brutal, injury riddled season.

Columbus Blue Jackets' Johnny Gaudreau pledges to continue charitable effort started by Patrik Laine

Going into last season, Laine pledged to donate \$1,000 for every point that he tallied to the OhioHealth Foundation in support of men's mental health awareness.

It's an issue that's become immensely important to Laine, who struggled through another season of physical injuries that limited his ice time before he eventually enrolled in the NHL/NHL Players

Association joint player assistance program. He'd only played 18 games upon entry into the program, which essentially ended his season in late January with just six goals, three assists and nine points.

Gaudreau took note of Laine's charitable idea when it was announced in October 2023 and got a lightbulb moment during the Jackets' mid-season "bye" week. He announced through the team that he'd donate \$1,000 for every point he tallied from that point through the end of the season to Laine's charity.

Starting with an assist in the Jackets' 6-3 loss that night in Ottawa, Gaudreau contributed 25 points on four goals and 21 assists in the final 29 games for a \$25,000 contribution to boost Laine's total donation amount from \$9,000 to \$34,000. Laine also took to Twitter/X earlier that day to call out a podcast for making insensitive remarks about his exit from the team, which Gaudreau also stood up to oppose when asked about it after the game.

It was an impressive display of humanity and leadership from Gaudreau, especially while dealing with the sting of a frustrating loss to the Ottawa Senators.

"We miss Patty in the locker room," Gaudreau said. "We miss seeing him around the rink and having him around the rink, so when I saw he was doing that (charitable effort) to start the season, I thought it was awesome. I thought it was for a great cause, and then he had to go into the program to kind of deal with stuff like that, so I thought, 'What better way to support him than to pick up from where he left off,' and try to help out any way I can."

The Athletic / Blue Jackets, Flames vigils for Gaudreau brothers allow fans, players to mourn: 'Let's keep their stories alive'

By Aaron Portzline, Julian McKenzie- September 5, 2024

As fans approached the plaza outside Nationwide Arena on Wednesday, the Columbus Blue Jackets had staffers positioned at all of the possible entry points with two boxes in hand. One held candles, the other tissues.

Turns out, both were in short supply.

The Blue Jackets could not immediately provide an estimate of the crowd size, but more than 2,000 candles were handed out for a team-sponsored vigil to honor the lives of Blue Jackets forward Johnny Gaudreau and his brother, Matthew, who were killed last Thursday night when they were struck by a car while riding bicycles near their childhood home in New Jersey.

As for tissues, there may never be enough.

Blue Jackets fans — but, really, the entire city of Columbus and beyond — has been gutted by the sadness by this story. The vigil was to honor the Gaudreaus, of course, but it also helped a grieving community to gather and hug and, yes, cry together. A similar vigil was held on Wednesday night in Calgary, where Johnny Gaudreau began his NHL career.

As the Blue Jackets players spoke outside their arena, sniffing and quiet sobbing could be heard among the crowd.

"This is a heartbreak that words alone cannot heal," Blue Jackets captain Boone Jenner told the crowd.

"That said, the support from you guys — for us as a team, and more importantly for the Gaudreau family — has been incredible to see. We're so happy, we're so proud to be part of this community.

"As we continue to grieve together, let's continue sharing our incredible memories of Johnny and Matty. Let's keep their stories alive, hold them in our thoughts, and keep them in our prayers. Nothing will fill the void in our hearts, but our memories will help us get through this difficult time."

Blue Jackets president and general manager Don Waddell and three players — Jenner, Erik Gudbranson and Cole Sillinger — spoke to the crowd. Looking back at them were hundreds of fans in Gaudreau's No. 13 Blue Jackets sweater, but also Calgary Flames, Boston College and Team USA sweaters.

"Thank you very much for being here," Gudbranson said. "It means the world to our dressing room that you guys are not only standing by us in tough times during hockey seasons, but when it matters most.

"Our hearts are shattered in a million pieces, there's no doubt about that. Johnny was an amazing teammate and an amazing friend."

Gudbranson and Gaudreau played together in both Calgary and Columbus, and they signed the same day with the Blue Jackets two summers ago and had grown even closer the past two seasons. They were an odd coupling in one sense: Gudbranson a 6-foot-5 defenseman and Gaudreau a 5-foot-9 (maybe) forward.

"There's something that I'll miss very dearly," Gudbranson said. "I had this little thing with John, where I'd pick him up and give him a bearhug, and I wouldn't let him down until he told me he loved me. He wouldn't tell me for a long time. I know now, with him up there, that it's because he enjoyed the hug.

"I just miss him so much. It's wrong."

Sillinger, only 21, was the third player to speak. He's already played three NHL seasons, the past two as Gaudreau's teammate.

"My brothers and I played a lot of pond hockey growing up in Saskatchewan," he said. "Quite often, we'd pretend to be No. 13 for the Calgary Flames.

"I'm honored to call Johnny a great teammate and a great human. Love you, man."

(Aaron Portzline / The Athletic)

When the players finished speaking, the candles were lit. Within a few seconds, drips of wax joined the tears on the sidewalk.

The Blue Jackets then observed 13 minutes, 21 seconds of silence, with only the hum and rumble of the city in the background, to honor the sweater numbers worn by Johnny (13) and Matthew (21). Throughout the observed silence, a video of Gaudreau played on a screen high above the city.

When the silence lifted, a fan tried to start a "Johnny Hockey" chant. It started to get legs before a bagpipe wailed to the tune of "Amazing Grace."

Fans stood motionless for a few minutes after the program ended, their candles now melted down to a nub. As they turned to leave, the headquarters of the Nationwide insurance company — a high-rise building just across the street from the arena — had "CJB #13" illuminated on the side of the building.

(Aaron Portzline / The Athletic)

"It's obviously a difficult time for all of us, each one of you included," Waddell said. "We have a special group of people in this organization, a special group of players. Along with you, we will get through this together."

Similar sentiments were expressed in Calgary, where thousands of fans participated in a candlelight vigil outside Scotiabank Saddledome, most of them in red and white Flames jerseys and many of them wearing Gaudreau's No. 13. Moments before the vigil began, fans chanted "Johnny!" in honor of the forward who spent nine seasons as a Flame before joining the Blue Jackets in 2022.

A handful of Flames players, including captain Mikael Backlund, were in attendance along with general manager Craig Conroy, president and CEO Robert Hayes, team legends Lanny McDonald and Jarome Iginla, and members of Flames ownership.

"He carried this big hockey town on his small frame, and we always moved to the edge of our seats as he raced up the wing in anticipation of a yet another goal or another brilliant setup," McDonald said. "A hero to so many young kids across Calgary. They saw themselves in him, his passion, his dedication. He was proof. It's not the size of the dog in the fight, but the size of the fight in the dog."

Backlund was among those who shared personal stories of Johnny Gaudreau while also expressing condolences to his family. The Swedish forward was also "thankful" that he spent time with Gaudreau this summer at former teammate Andrew Mangiapane's wedding. Backlund remembered Gaudreau as a quiet teammate who enjoyed wearing comfortable clothes, such as sweatpants, boots and beanies, before stepping onto the ice and being "dominant" in practice. Gaudreau showed off his skill with his vision, dangles and dekes, sometimes at the expense of the future Flames leader. But Backlund also had prime viewing of Gaudreau at his best in a Flames uniform.

"Johnny always had a smile in his face, on and off the ice. I'm going to miss that smile," Backlund said.

Conroy was months into his new role as assistant to then-Flames GM Jay Feaster when the team drafted Gaudreau in 2011. He was surprised at the youngster's diminutive size — he once remarked at how

small Gaudreau was compared to the backpack he wore two days after being drafted — and noted Gaudreau’s penchant for eating Skittles. Conroy remembered taking six hours to convince Gaudreau to sign his entry-level contract to join the Flames after his third season at Boston College, only for Gaudreau to say that he wanted to spend another season at BC to play alongside his brother, Matthew.

“In reality, he told me after that he didn’t even register for classes, so we were going to be good to go,” Conroy said.

Just like Backlund and many other Flames teammates and fans, Conroy was enamored with Gaudreau’s talent. He knew Gaudreau would turn into a “special” player from his first night in the NHL, a night when he also scored his first goal, against the Vancouver Canucks.

“Over the next nine years, I had the privilege, front row, watching him go from a young boy mature into an NHL superstar,” Conroy said. “But more importantly, (he) grew into a wonderful man, son, husband and father.

At sunset, there was a 13-minute vigil for the Gaudreaus. Fans used flashlights on their phones and shed tears during the lengthy moment of silence.

The Flames will keep the fan-made memorial outside of the Saddledome for the next 13 days as part of the team’s observance of the memory of Johnny and Matthew.

The Athletic / Johnny Gaudreau's Blue Jackets teammates share their 'anger, sadness, disbelief, emptiness'

By Aaron Portzline- September 5, 2024

COLUMBUS, Ohio — One by one, they made their way to the microphone, a somber mood in the air and emotional cracks in their voices just barely below the surface.

Six days after a car struck and killed Columbus Blue Jackets forward Johnny Gaudreau and his brother, Matthew, the Blue Jackets gathered in Nationwide Arena and tried to articulate their feelings at a time when no such words existed.

“As a team, we’re going to get through this,” Blue Jackets captain Boone Jenner said. “We’re going to grieve, cry, be vulnerable, and support each other every step of the way, but we will persevere, because I know that’s what John would want.

“We’re not only going to remember John and Matthew during these difficult days or during this season alone. Their memories will stay with us forever.”

Jenner was the first player to speak, followed by Erik Gudbranson, Zach Werenski and Sean Kuraly. That’s the team captain and his three alternates. All of them wore matching blue team-issued polo shirts, with Gaudreau’s familiar No. 13 on the right side of the chest.

Club president and general manager Don Waddell, hired in late May, spoke first and was the only speaker, understandably, to take questions from media.

“The outpouring of love for Johnny and Matthew has been remarkable,” Waddell said, “not only from the NHL family, but from sports communities and people around the world. From New Jersey to Boston, Calgary to Columbus and everywhere in between, it has inspired us with love and support.

“I know it means the world to the Gaudreau family, and it means the world to our organization, as well.”

Waddell said the family is working to finalize memorial plans, and that the entire Blue Jackets club will travel to New Jersey for the funeral. Many Blue Jackets players and coaches are already in Columbus ahead of the beginning of training camp in two weeks. Candlelight vigils are scheduled for Wednesday night in both Columbus and Calgary, where Gaudreau started his NHL career.

For Waddell, this tragedy is an unfortunate reminder of one that occurred earlier in his career when he was general manager of the Atlanta Thrashers. On Sept. 29, 2003, Thrashers forward Dan Snyder was critically injured when a car driven by teammate Dany Heatley was involved in a single-car crash. Snyder died six days later.

When an organization is rocked to its foundation by such a loss, Waddell said, it’s more important than ever that a team function like a team.

“We have four leaders right here (Jenner, Gudbranson, Kuraly and Werenski) who are going to play a major role in it,” Waddell said. “I was talking to Boone this weekend about getting the team together. They are each others’ brothers. It’s everybody’s job to help everybody through.”

Right now, and for the next little while, everybody is leaning on each other.

Jenner is one of the most sturdy, stoic players in the NHL. But he fought back tears on several occasions as he poured out how close he’d become with Gaudreau in just two years as his teammate.

“It was easy to see very quickly how tight-knit and together the Gaudreau family is,” Jenner said. “And one thing I admired was that John never forgot where he came from. In the past few days, moving through all of the emotions — anger, sadness, disbelief, emptiness — I’ve come to realize how much love I have for John.

“He lived and played with a joy I was so lucky to have witnessed. He was a close friend, someone I felt I’d known for a lifetime.”

Werenski remembered the day Gaudreau signed a free agent contract with Columbus — July 13, 2022 — as one of the most exciting days in his nine seasons in the organization.

“I’m going to miss watching him be an amazing dad,” Werenski said. “All of us are just going to miss Johnny so much. I just want to say thanks for letting me be a part of your life for two years.”

Forever 'Johnny Hockey': Gaudreau's inspiring skill transcended his size

Kuraly said the outpouring of love, and the expressions of grief, from across North America have matched the feeling among players.

“We’re gutted and heartbroken for the family,” he said. “John leaves us a life example of love, simplicity and joy. He expressed that for the masses through hockey, and he expressed it personally through his relationships — which explains why he was universally adored in the community and with the lives who were lucky enough to know No. 13.”

Gudbranson and Gaudreau played together in both Calgary and Columbus. They signed with the Blue Jackets on the same day and became even closer in Ohio than they’d been with the Flames. Their families, both with young kids, were bonded, too.

“My hope for his family is that one day your grief and sorrow is relieved by the beautiful memories those boys gave you,” Gudbranson said. “In the interim, we will always think of you and pray for you. And we will always be available to you,”

Gudbranson ended his thoughts with a public service plea to end impaired driving. The driver of the car that struck the Gaudreau brothers is being investigated for driving under the influence and has been charged with two counts of death by auto, according to police.

10TV / 'They will remain in our hearts forever': Blue Jackets GM, players remember Johnny and Matthew Gaudreau

By 10TV Web Staff- September 5, 2024

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Columbus Blue Jackets President and General Manager Don Waddell along with several players spoke publicly for the first time about the loss of Johnny Gaudreau and his brother Matthew on Wednesday. The Gaudreau brothers were killed by a suspected drunken driver last week in their home state of New Jersey on the eve of their sister's wedding.

Waddell began Wednesday's press conference by saying the outpouring of love from Columbus, the sports world and across the world for Johnny and Matthew has been remarkable.

"From New Jersey to Boston, Calgary to Columbus and everywhere in between have inspired us with expressions of love and support. I know that means the world to the Gaudreau family and it means the world to our organization as well. Thank you," Waddell said.

Waddell has only been the Blue Jackets GM for a couple of months but said he knew Johnny from his USA Hockey days. He described Johnny as someone who was always proud to wear the USA Hockey jersey and he played the game with great joy.

"While there is a huge hole in our lineup, there is an even larger one in our hearts," Waddell said. Gaudreau's teammates, Boone Jenner, Erik Gudbranson, Zach Werenski and Sean Kuraly, spoke after Waddell. They all talked about how much they loved Johnny and his impact on the Blue Jackets organization.

Jenner expressed how great of a teammate he was and an even better person off the ice.

"John was a close friend and someone I felt like I've known for a lifetime," Jenner said. "As a team, we are going to get through this together. We are going to grieve, cry, be vulnerable and support each other every step of the way. But we will persevere because I know that's what Johnny would have wanted."

Jenner added that "they will remain in our hearts forever."

Gudbranson, who has played for several NHL teams, played with Johnny in Calgary before they reunited in Columbus. Although Gudbranson said he had many great teammates, he struggled to find connection with many of them because of how often he moved around. That wasn't the case with Johnny.

"When I moved to Calgary, we had our first beer together. I knew it was different. Over the next few years, that only grew. Your unique way of driving me crazy only brought me closer," Gudbranson said.

Werenski, who has been with Columbus for nine years, said the day Johnny signed with CBJ was the most exciting moment he's as a Blue Jacket.

"I remember texting Boon and Eric Robinson when the reports were coming out and we just couldn't believe it," Werenski said. "Johnny Hockey was a player that everyone watched whether you were a hockey fan or not."

Werenski added that Johnny was a special person and an amazing father.

"I just want to say thank you John for letting me be a part of your life."

Waddell said plans are in the works to honor Johnny during the club's first home game next month but the team is focused on grieving.

Funeral services are still being finalized. Waddell said the team plans on attending.

ABC6 / Emotional CBJ leaders share their memories of Johnny, Matthew Gaudreau

By WSYX Staff- September 5, 2024

COLUMBUS, Ohio (WSYX) — Several Columbus Blue Jackets fought back tears while making their first public comments about friend and teammate Johnny Gaudreau and his brother, Matthew Gaudreau.

The siblings were killed by a suspected drunk driver in their home state of New Jersey on Thursday. They were riding bikes a day before the family was planning to gather for their sister's wedding.

Team General Manager Don Waddell, captain Boone Jenner, defensemen Erik Gudbranson and Zach Werenski, and forward Sean Kuraly shared their memories of the Gaudreau brothers at a news conference Wednesday afternoon.

The outpouring of love for Johnny and Matthew has been remarkable, not only from our community but from around the world. I know that means the world to the Gaudreau family and to our organization." Waddell said.

"He played the game with great joy, which was apparent to all those who saw him," Waddell added.

Jenner spoke next about Johnny's joy and his family.

"It's difficult to find the right words in the face of this heartbreaking tragedy," Jenner said. "I'm very honored to be able to speak about the positive impact he's had on our entire lives.

"The stories and videos we've been seeing are incredibly moving and need to continue to be released. Their legacy deserves to be remembered and celebrated."

We will deeply miss the joy, whether it was off the ice or at home with his family," Jenner said while fighting back tears. "A joy I was so lucky to have witnessed.

Jenner went on to talk about Gaudreau as a teammate.

"As a teammate, he didn't just win us countless games, take our fans out of their seats, and set us up for easy goals," he said. "His positive energy day in and day out was infectious when you're around him."

As a team, we're going to get through this together. We're gonna grieve, cry, be vulnerable and support each other every step of the way. But we will persevere, because we know that's what Johnny would have wanted," Jenner said.

Gudbranson, who played with Gaudreau in Calgary, spoke next.

"My hope is that one day your grief and sorrow is relived by the beautiful memories those boys gave you," Gudbranson said directly to the grieving family members.

"To John, I've been lucky enough to play all around North America, and I've been blessed with many amazing teammates. Within all that movement, I struggled to find a constant connection with many of them. When I moved to Calgary, we had our first beer together. I knew it was different."

Gudbranson went on to talk about Gaudreau's lack of professionalism that drove him nuts, like showing up late and wearing hoodies to dinner.

He then spoke of Johnny as a father and husband.

"You were an amazing father. I'll forever remember you complaining about a sore back after spending a night in Noah's crib," Eric said through tears, "and the pride you carried the day you brought Johnny into the room for the first time.

"The love you shared with Meredith was a site to behold. You were truly a family man."

He then had a message for everyone.

"If you think about driving after having a few beers, please, please do not," Gudbranson said. "Find a way home."

Werenski spoke about what it meant for Gaudreau to come to Columbus as a free agent before the 2022-23 season.

"I've been in Columbus for nine years, and there's never been a day as exciting as when John signed here," Werenski said. "My dad even drove over to have a celebratory beer because we were so excited about it."

"I just want to say thank you John for choosing Columbus when other people wouldn't. You brought so much joy and excitement to this city, I've never seen anything like it," Werenski added.

Kuraly spoke last.

"Good to the core, John leaves us a life example of love, simplicity and joy. He expressed that to the masses through hockey, and personally through his relationships, which explains why he was universally adored and loved by those lucky enough to know him," Kuraly said.

"To say John will be missed doesn't completely capture it. May you and your brother Matt rest peacefully."

Earlier Wednesday, Meredith Gaudreau posted about how today would have been her and Johnny's three-year wedding anniversary.

After the players spoke -- at least two of them referenced Gaudreau's unusual pregame meal consisting of pasta, butter, no sauce and a Coke -- Waddell talked about how the leaders would help the team move forward.

"You got four of the leaders right here that are gonna play a major role in it," Waddell said of the Columbus quartet. "They're each other's brothers, these guys will do a tremendous job to help everyone through."

Waddell said the team will attend the services together.

Six days after the tragedy, fans are still milling around in disbelief outside Nationwide Arena, as they were again Wednesday.

"It's just an incredibly sad story with (what) the family is going through," Terri Quatman said. "It's a tight community. These Columbus fans just want to give the support any way they can."

Suspect due in court Thursday

Meanwhile, in New Jersey, 43-year-old Sean Higgins is expected to appear in court Thursday. He's facing two counts of vehicular homicide.

Following his arrest, ABC 6 learned that Higgins is a New Jersey national guardsman who also worked for a drug and alcohol abuse treatment provider.

CNN / Columbus Blue Jackets teammates honor the late Johnny Gaudreau

By David Close- September 5, 2024

Columbus Blue Jackets players Boone Jenner, Erik Gudbranson, Sean Kuraly, and Zach Werenski each somberly honored their former teammate, Johnny Gaudreau, on Wednesday at a press conference arranged by the team.

“In the past few days, moving through all the emotions – anger, sadness, disbelief, and emptiness – I’ve come to realize how much love I have for John,” the Blue Jackets’ captain Jenner said while recounting the shock of losing a beloved peer and the utter sadness he felt.

“Many of us know John for his superstardom presence on the ice. He played with such joy and passion, dominating at every level he went despite the odds stacked against him due to his size.

“But we will deeply miss the way he carried that same joy off the ice, whether it was at the arena or at home with his family, the joy I was so lucky to have witnessed,” Jenner said while trying to hold back tears.

The four players each wore blue, team-issued collared shirts with Gaudreau’s No. 13 stitched in and took turns dedicating words to Gaudreau and his brother Matthew.

The brothers were killed late Thursday night after being struck by a suspected drunken driver while riding bikes on a New Jersey roadway, just hours before they were to serve as groomsmen at their sister’s wedding in Philadelphia.

Jenner choked up while remembering how Gaudreau and his wife, Meredith, supported Jenner and his wife during a “tough time” earlier in the year.

“They were there for us like a family of their own.”

Jenner was able to smile while recounting Gaudreau’s unique diet.

“John was truly one of a kind. One of the many things I’ll miss is seeing people’s reaction to his pregame meal routine for the first time - a mountain of sauce-free pasta topped with butter (and) paired with a Coke,” the 11-year NHL veteran said.

Erik Gudbranson, who played with Gaudreau while the two were members of the Calgary Flames, also said his former teammate was “one of a kind” and that he loved him.

“You’re an amazing father. I’ll forever remember you complaining about a sore back after spending the night in Noa’s (Gaudreau’s daughter) crib and the pride you carried the day you brought Johnny (Gaudreau’s son) into the room for the first time.

“The love you shared with Meredith was a sight to behold.

“You are truly a family man, and you will continue to inspire me,” Gudbranson said, getting emotional.

After his dedication, Gudbranson pleaded to those gathered and those watching on the team’s YouTube site not to drink and drive - referring to Sean Higgins, who was charged with two counts of vehicular homicide in the second degree after Thursday’s incident.

“If you think about driving after a few beers or a fun night, please, please, please do not. Find a way home.”

The team's general manager and president of hockey operations, Don Waddell, said he had been in touch with the families and planned for the team to attend the Gaudreau brother's funeral.

A date for the service has yet to be announced.

Waddell said there was still too much grieving to work through before planning how to honor Gaudreau at the team's first home game.

[NBC4 / Blue Jackets host candlelight vigil for Johnny Gaudreau and his brother](#)

By David DeGuzman, Orri Benatar and Anna Hoffman- September 5, 2024

COLUMBUS, Ohio (WCMH) — Fans were invited to remember the lives of Johnny Gaudreau and his brother, Matthew, during a candlelight vigil on Wednesday night hosted by the Blue Jackets.

The vigil began at 7:30 p.m. and will take place on the Front Street Plaza outside the east entrance to Nationwide Arena. Members of the organization gave brief remarks.

There were also 13 minutes, 21 seconds of silent remembrance that began around 7:52 p.m., a nod to the No. 13 jersey Johnny wore with the Blue Jackets, Calgary Flames and Boston College and to the No. 21 jersey that Matthew wore with in college with the Eagles. *You can watch the vigil in its entirety the video player above, including the silence.*

“That entire time that he was away from the rink, he was sitting on the couch with Meredith and his children being the best possible father he could be,” Erik Gudbranson, a defenseman for CBJ, said during the vigil.

Fans said they were struck by the turnout and respectful silence they heard. One fan commented it was the most silence they had ever witnessed on the grounds of Nationwide Arena.

“It was a tragedy,” said Blue Jackets fan Sandra Jones. “It should have never happened, should’ve never happened. He meant a lot to Columbus and to the Jackets and to us fans.”

Before Wednesday evening’s vigil, the Blue Jackets’ president of hockey operations Don Waddell along with team captain Boone Jenner and alternate captains Erik Gudbranson, Zach Werenski, and Sean Kuraly addressed the media to reflect on the Gaudreau brothers’ lives.

“Where there is a huge hole in our lineup, there is an even larger one in our hearts,” said Waddell. “Our immediate focus is on supporting the Gaudreau family and supporting each other.” Waddell said the whole team is planning to attend the funeral in New Jersey.

Browns sign 20-year stadium rights deal with Huntington Bank

His teammates said they are heartbroken for the Gaudreau family and that you could tell by the way Johnny talks how much his family means to him.

“We are gutted and heartbroken for the Gaudreau and Morris families as dad, mom, Jane, wife Meredith and all who loved and knew John,” said Kuraly.

The Blue Jackets captains each shared the impact and joy that Johnny Gaudreau and his family had in their lives despite only being in Columbus for two seasons. “The joy. I was so lucky to have witnessed,” said Jenner while holding back tears. “John was a close friend and someone I felt I have known for a lifetime.”

“Thank you John for letting me be a part of your life,” said Werenski. “It’s been so special to get to know him and his family firsthand and while this pain may never go away, I think we can all find a little comfort in knowing that Johnny and Matty lived life to the fullest every day.”

The Gaudreau brothers were killed Thursday night when they were riding bicycles in southern New Jersey and were struck by a suspected drunk driver.

Police arrested Sean M. Higgins and charged him with two counts of vehicular homicide after he hit the Gaudreaus from behind while trying to pass two vehicles. Higgins worked for a drug and alcohol treatment center based in Norristown, Pennsylvania.

“If you think about driving after a few beers or a fun night, please please please do not find a way home,” said Gudbranson, who was teammates with Gaudreau in Columbus and with the Calgary Flames.

Tributes have been pouring in for the Gaudreau brothers since the tragedy. Moments of silence were held across Columbus at the Buckeyes and Crew games. A memorial outside Nationwide Arena continued to grow and a GoFundMe page to support Matthew’s widow, Madeline, who is expecting a child in the next few months, has raised over \$500,000.

“As a team we’re going to get through this together,” said Jenner. “We’re going to grieve, cry, be vulnerable, and support each other every step of the way.”

[NHL.com / Blue Jackets community mourns Gaudreau at moving vigil](#)

By Nicholas J. Cotsonika- September 5, 2024

COLUMBUS -- Johnny Gaudreau looked down from above.

As part of a huge photo montage stretching across the side of Nationwide Arena, the Columbus Blue Jackets forward appeared larger than life, frozen in time the way he should be remembered as a player - following through on a shot, doing what he loved.

Hundreds of mourners gathered beneath him on Front Street Plaza on Wednesday for a moving candlelight vigil. He and his brother, Matthew, died Thursday when they were struck by a car while riding bicycles at home in Salem County, New Jersey. Johnny was 31; Matthew was 29.

Johnny Hockey meant different things to different people. Some were inspired by how he succeeded despite his 5-foot-9, 163-pound frame. Some loved watching his skill and creativity on the ice. But if there was a unifying theme here, it was this:

“One, this is just tragic, and then two, he chose Columbus,” said Eric Amerine, 26, of Dublin, Ohio, wearing a Gaudreau Calgary Flames jersey. “We choose him as well. It’s bigger than hockey. We’re a community here. It means a lot to us.”

Multiple stars had chosen to leave Columbus over the years. Then Johnny shocked the NHL by signing with the Blue Jackets as an unrestricted free agent July 13, 2022, after nine seasons with the Flames.

“He came here,” said Jess Machan, 42, from Gahanna, Ohio, wearing a Gaudreau Flames jersey. “It was like a miracle. I made jokes that day. I was like, ‘Hey, Johnny Hockey’s going to come here to Columbus.’ ‘He is not. Shut up!’ And he did! I was like, ‘Ha!’”

Johnny and his wife, Meredith, had their two children in Columbus -- a daughter, Noa, and a son, Johnny.

“I think Johnny made that decision to raise his family here, so it’s easy to root for a guy like that,” said Derrill Weaver, 66, of Lancaster, Ohio, wearing a Gaudreau Blue Jackets jersey.

Mourners had created a makeshift memorial on the plaza following the tragedy, leaving flowers and photos, jerseys and shirts, hockey sticks and mini sticks. They left bottles of Johnny’s favorite sports drink, grape Gatorade, and packages of his favorite candy, Skittles. They left handwritten messages in many forms -- in chalk on the bricks, in ink on letters and signs.

The Blue Jackets had boxes of candles and tissues ready when the mourners began arriving for the vigil around 6:30 p.m. ET on Wednesday. The plaza quietly filled with people, many in Gaudreau jerseys.

Johnny’s teammates and their families walked out of the arena and onto the plaza about 7:40 p.m. ET. General manager Don Waddell, captain Boone Jenner, defenseman Erik Gudbranson and forward Cole Sillinger each stepped up onto a small podium, took the microphone and shared a few words.

“I would like to thank all of you for being here tonight for this remarkable outpouring of love and support you have shown for the Gaudreau family and our Blue Jackets family since the loss of Johnny and Matthew,” Waddell said. “I know this has been a great comfort to everyone who knew and loved him.

“This is obviously a very difficult time for all of us, each one of you included. We have a special group of people in this organization, a special group of players, and along with you, we will get through this together.”

As the sun began to set behind the building, the mourners lit their candles and watched a slide show of photos on a screen above the parking garage across the street. They were supposed to stand for a moment of silence lasting 13:21. Johnny’s number was No. 13 for Boston College, Calgary and Columbus. Matthew’s was No. 21 for Boston College.

No one made a sound as the photos flickered one by one. There were hockey photos, but there were perhaps more family photos. After the clock hit 13:21, the moment of silence stretched longer than scheduled, because everyone was still looking at photos of Johnny with his wife and kids.

Finally, John H. McConnell II -- grandson of John H. McConnell, the late founder of the Blue Jackets -- thanked everyone for coming.

“The response from our city, our hockey community and beyond has been incredible,” he said. “It is a testament to the character of both John and Matthew and the many, many lives they touched. As we leave here tonight, I ask you to continue to keep the Gaudreau families in your prayers.”

One fan broke the silence by shouting, “Johnny Hockey!” He tried to get a chant going. A few joined, but most didn’t have the heart, or didn’t feel it appropriate, to do so. As bagpipes played “Amazing Grace,” the crowd fell silent again. Johnny’s teammates and their families went back inside, and the mourners left as quietly as they came.

[Sportsnet.ca / Calgary vigil a reflection of Gaudreau's community spirit](#)

By Eric Francis- September 5, 2024

CALGARY — It was the type of silence Johnny Gaudreau knew well.

The kind one of his slick setups would induce in opposing rinks around the NHL.

For 13 minutes upwards of 10,000 jersey-clad fans stood at the west stairs of the Saddledome Wednesday night, holding their cell phones aloft with virtual candlelight flickering on the screens.

As they did, the only sounds other than a hovering drone were of those sniffing, or crying.

The sun had just set, the bagpipes had finished and there stood the Sea of Red Eyes looking up at Flames players, staff, alumni and family members who had gathered 22 steps above the crowd.

Flames luminaries like Lanny McDonald, Jarome Iginla, Craig Conroy and their families looked back at the masses, heads bowed in memory of Johnny and Matthew Gaudreau.

Both groups took comfort in the company of one another, as great communities do.

Craig Conroy shares fond memories of Johnny and Matthew Gaudreau

Six days after the crushing news that the two brothers had been killed by a suspected drunk driver while cycling on a rural New Jersey road, the Flames held a candlelight vigil to mark 13 days of mourning for the most talented No. 13 of his era.

On this night, as they always do when celebrating their heroes, the Flames did the family proud.

Did the city proud.

If you were there, be proud.

It was a memorable, fitting tribute for a player and his brother this city will never forget.

“To see all of you here, this is what makes me proud to be a Calgarian,” said Conroy, one of four speakers to open the evening.

“And this is what made Johnny so proud of this city.”

The event was born out of the organic display of love, respect and sadness shown by a city that reacted to the tragedy by dropping off flowers, sticks, jerseys, photos, purple Gatorade and Skittles on the steps of the rink Johnny spent nine seasons lifting people out of their seats in.

The memorial, which has since shifted from the stairs to the adjacent hill, continues to grow, as it will for a 13-day period of mourning.

“Johnny didn’t crave the spotlight, but with that big smile and those fast hands he couldn’t outrun his fate — he was a hero,” said McDonald, voice shaking several times with emotion.

“He carried this big hockey town on his small frame.

“Let our chants echo so loudly the boys can hear it in the sky.”

Lanny McDonald delivers heartfelt speech for Johnny and Matthew Gaudreau

His words were punctuated by one of several impromptu chants of “Johnny, Johnny.”

Outside of those cheers, the entire evening had the feel of a funeral, the likes of which the Flames players will attend Monday in New Jersey.

Mikael Backlund's turn at the mic proved to be one of the most heart-wrenching, as the Flames captain had trouble starting his speech as he fought back tears.

He eventually was able to reflect on some of the happier times with the diminutive superstar.

"He came into the room quiet and tired every morning, we never knew what pair of sweats he was going to show up in," said Backlund.

"He loved his Ugg boots and his beanie, no matter how warm it was. Johnny was all about being comfortable."

Shortly after arriving as a collegiate star, the soft-spoken Gaudreau did indeed find tremendous comfort in a town that embraced him from Day 1.

"I'm going to miss Johnny chirping me about everything," continued Backlund.

"He would always say, 'C'mon Backs, talk to the coach and get us a day off.

"'C'mon Backs, have a beer.'

"'C'mon Backs loosen up, it's just hockey.'"

'Love you man': Backlund delivers emotional tribute to Gaudreau

Conroy smiled when relaying stories about drafting the 150-pound hopeful, signing him and bringing him back on a flight on which Gaudreau pulled out a big bag of Skittles — the candy his father used to teach him how to skate.

"For the next 25 to 30 minutes he just pounded those Skittles," smiled Conroy, "and I'm thinking, 'this is the next superstar of the Calgary Flames? I don't know about that.'"

He soon knew, as did the rest of the town.

And this place will never forget.

Wrapped up by a slow, country version of Johnny Be Good sung by the Flames' star anthem singer George Canyon, the vigil was a beautiful reminder of what this city is all about.

Two years after Gaudreau made the agonizing decision to sign in Columbus to be closer to his family, Flames fans chose to cherish, honour and remember the good times brought on by a great person who bought into the community spirit that makes this city so special.

Sure, they were hurt by his departure but they are hurting much more now.

We all are, as an unspeakable tragedy like this goes far beyond the game and the city that bonds us.

"I hope this untimely passing of these young men will force people to stop for a second," said McDonald, adding a powerful reminder.

"And I pray it leads to people to make different choices in the moment so that no other family will have to endure what the Gaudreaus now face."

Kudos Calgary, for doing your damndest to show them they're not facing it alone.

The Hockey Writers / Blue Jackets make first public statements since tragedy

By Mark Scheig- September 5, 2024

The Columbus Blue Jackets made their first public comments on Wednesday afternoon since the tragic deaths of Johnny & Matthew Gaudreau. As you could imagine, emotions were running very high.

In all, GM Don Waddell along with the captains Boone Jenner, Erik Gudbranson, Zach Werenski and Sean Kuraly all made statements about the impact of Johnny with the Blue Jackets. While Waddell took three questions at the end, the players did not answer questions after their statements were read. Understandably so. They were not ready for that phase yet.

The Blue Jackets were able to clarify a couple of points though. First, services for the Gaudreau's are still being finalized. They are taking the family's lead. They will announce plans once they are known. They do expect that to be soon. In addition, Waddell confirmed that the entire team will be at the services.

Here is what Waddell and the players said on Wednesday. It was hard for them to fight back tears while they were reading their statements. It was evident not only how fresh this still is, but how impactful the Gaudreau's were.

Waddell's Statement

"Last week, the Gaudreau family suffered a loss as immeasurable and impossible to comprehend. Johnny and Matthew were tragically taken from their family in a cruel and senseless manner, and I ask that everyone continue to keep this very close, that loving family in your thoughts and prayers. They also left behind friends, teammates, coaches all over the world, and fans that continue to mourn their passing. The outpouring of love for John and Matthew has been remarkable, not only among the NHL family, but from our local sports community, as well as teams and leads around the world. From New Jersey to Boston, Calgary to Columbus and everywhere in between have inspired us with the expressions of love and support. I know that means the world to the Gaudreau family, and it means the world to our organization as well. Thank you."

"My personal experience with Johnny is through USA hockey between World Juniors and playing on multiple national teams. Johnny was always very proud to put on that USA hockey jersey. He was obviously an exceptional player, one of the best in the National Hockey League. He played the game with great joy, which was apparent to everyone that ever saw him. I witnessed it firsthand many times from the opposing team. I was very much looking forward to being on the same team with him here in Columbus. And talking to people in the organization, including the guys with me here today, it's apparent just how special a person Johnny was and how significant his loss is being felt by everyone. Whether it's a huge hole in our lineup, there's even a larger one in our hearts."

"I know there are questions related to our team and how we're going to move forward without Johnny and the impact this loss will have on our lineup. Those questions will be for another day. Our immediate focus is on supporting the Gaudreau family and supporting each other as we continue to grieve the loss of Johnny and Matthew. Thank you for being here today."

Jenner's Statement

"It's difficult to find the right words in the face of this heartbreaking and unimaginable tragedy that took the lives of our teammate, John Gaudreau and his brother Matty Gaudreau. I want to start off by extending my family's, my teammates, and I's deepest condolences, thoughts, love, and many prayers to the Gaudreau family, including Noah, little John, Guy, Jane, Madeline, and Tripp, Katie and Kristen and

all other family and close friends of John and Matthew. You've been in our thoughts every second of every day. I didn't know Matthew as well as I know John, but from the stories that I've heard from John and others, it's clear that they were incredibly close and shared an inseparable bond. Whenever you met one Gaudreau, it wasn't long after you were meeting another and then receiving a bottle of Guy's homemade maple syrup. It was easy to see very quickly how tight knit and together their family was. One thing I admired was that John never forgot where he came from."

"In the past few days moving through all the emotions: anger, sadness, disbelief and emptiness. I've come to realize how much love I have for John. I'm very honored to be able to speak to what John meant, not only to me, but all of his teammates and the positive impact he had on our lives. The support has been unbelievable from everyone coming up from not only from the Blue Jackets, the fifth line and the city of Columbus, but around the world. It's clear how many people these two brothers touched, specifically in the hockey community and in Calgary and New Jersey. The stories and videos we've been seeing are incredibly moving and need to continue to be put out there to highlight just how impactful John and Matt were. Their legacy deserves to be remembered and celebrated."

"Many of us know John for his superstar and presence on the ice. He played with such joy and passion dominating at every level he went despite the odds stacked against him due to his size. But we'll deeply miss the way he carried that same joy off the ice, whether it was at the arena or at home with his family. The joy I was so lucky to have witnessed. John was a close friend and someone I felt I'd known for a lifetime. His jokes and banter were always a consistent presence, whether we're in the locker room, on the bus, on a plane, or in a hotel room. John was truly one of a kind. One of the many things we'll miss is seeing people's reaction to his pregame meal routine for the first time: A mountain of sauce-free pasta, topped with butter, paired with a Coke."

"As a teammate, he didn't just win us countless games, take our fans out of their seats and set up many of us for easy goals. His positive energy day in and day out was infectious when you were around him. We're really going to miss the way he made us laugh and smile on any given day, especially after a big win by his Eagles. We would hear about it for the next week. I don't think I've met a more competitive guy. It wasn't just in hockey journey, scoring competitions and warm up or pregame skates at our team gatherings. You can always find Johnny challenging someone to a game, whether it's Big Buck Hunter, corn hole, Golden Tee or pool. He was good at everything and rarely lost. But if he did, he was asking for a rematch. Double or nothing. Seeing John as a father was clear his family meant everything to him. We'll miss seeing his joy coming upstairs to our family room after every home game, to greet Mary and the kids despite often being the last to join us after a well earned sauna and a beer. The smile. The smile on his and Noa's face is when they saw each other was unmatched."

"When my wife and I went through a tough time this year, John (was) there for us like family of their own. Just being around John was a huge comfort for me, even when he didn't even realize or try. That to me says everything about the kind of person he was. As a team, we are gonna get through this together. We're gonna grieve, cry, be vulnerable, and support each other every step of the way. But we will persevere because I know that's what Johnny would've wanted. We're not only gonna remember and honor John and Matthew during these difficult days or this season alone. Their memory will stay with us forever. We'll cherish their joy and passion for hockey and family. Words cannot fully express how much they will be missed. They will remain in our hearts forever. Our continued thoughts and prayers with the Gaudreau's. Rest in peace John and Matty."

Gudbranson's Statement

"Bear me on this one. It is truly heartbreaking to the Gaudreau's and to the Morris' along with the community of friends. I'm so sorry for your loss. And my hope is that one day your grief and sorrow is

one day relieved by the beautiful memories those boys gave you. And in the interim, we will always pray for you and think of you. And beyond that, we'll always be available to you. To Matt, I had the pleasure of meeting you a few times. I noticed the twinkle in John's eye when you were around. It's the same one I share with my siblings. A deep love and a deep appreciation of your presence. Anywhere you were together, John felt at home. To Madeline and Tripp, you're in our hearts as you navigate your loss. To John, I've been lucky to play all around North America, and I've been blessed with many amazing teammates. Though within all that movement, I struggled to find constant connection with many of them. When I moved to Calgary, we had our first beer together, Fort Lauderdale Hotel. I knew it was different. Over the next few years, that only grew. Your unique way of driving me crazy only brought me closer. There was always a method to the madness. Our rides to the rink and knowing my stress level for punctuality, you would walk out seven minutes late. Trying to look professional at dinner the night before a game wearing a hoodie and a tube and 10-year-old sweatpants."

"You were one of a kind, and we loved you, and we still do. You're an amazing father. I'll forever remember you complaining about a sore back after spending the night in Noa's crib, and the pride you carried the day you brought Johnny into the room for the first time. The love you shared with Meredith was a sight to behold. You were truly a family man. And we will continue and you'll continue to inspire me to be just like you. To Guy, Jane, Kristen, and Katie, and your extended family and friends. Nothing I can say here will fill the void in your hearts. But we are here if you need us. And one final point to everyone. If you think about driving after a few beers or a fun night, please, please, please do not find a way home. Thank you."

Werenski's Statement

"Hi everyone. First, I wanna offer my deepest condolences to the entire family, the extended families and all friends and people that love John and Matthew. We all know how much John and Matty meant to everyone. And while there'll always be an empty feeling without them, I hope we can all find peace and comfort knowing that they've touched the lives of so many people. I didn't know Matty, so this will be about John, but he deserves to be honored each and every day just the same as John will be. I've been here in Columbus for nine years and I can't say there's ever been a day as exciting as when John signed here. I remember texting Boone (Jenner) and Eric Robinson when the reports were coming out and we just couldn't believe it. My dad even drove over and had a celebratory drink because we were so excited about it. Johnny Hockey was a player that everyone watched. Whether you were a hockey fan or not, you had the ability to give people out on their feet at any given moment. Highlight after highlight. Personally, I want to thank John for having so many highlights 'cause the ones he has dangling around me seem to get lost in the shuffle."

"But seriously, I just wanna say thank you, John, for choosing Columbus when other people wouldn't. He brought so much joy and excitement to this city. I've never quite seen anything like it. Something like this only special players can do, and that's what you are. Over the past two years, I've gotten to know John and his family, and I could see just how much they meant to him. They were his whole world, especially his wife Meredith and his kids. Knowing Johnny, there are so many things I'm gonna miss about John, starting with that huge plate of pasta with a Coke before games. I'm gonna miss watching him being an amazing dad. I'm gonna miss being in the family room after games when he would walk in and Noa would run over to him, yelling for her dad, putting her arms up for a hug. I am gonna miss sitting across with him on the plane playing cards after big wins and tough losses. I'm even gonna miss hearing him call Goody a donkey, and I'm watching the two of them banter like the brothers that they were."

"I'll always love and miss John so much. I just wanna say thank you, John, for letting me be a part of your life. It's been so special to get to know him and his family firsthand, and while his pain will never go

away, I think we can all find a little comfort in knowing that Johnny and Matty lived life to the fullest every day. Thank you.”

Kuraly’s Statement

“Hi everybody. First, we’re gutted and heartbroken for the Gaudreau’s and the Morris families. His dad Guy, mom Jane, wife Meredith, and all who loved and knew John. Good To the core, John leaves us a life’s example of love, simplicity, and joy. He expressed that for the masses through hockey and personally through his relationships, which explains why he was universally adored in all the communities and lives that were lucky enough to enjoy number 13. We are sending all of our love and support to the Gaudreau’s and Morris families during this heartbreaking tragedy. To say John will be missed doesn’t completely capture...May you and your brother Matt rest peacefully.”

The Hockey News / 'Universally Adored': Blue Jackets players, GM express grief at loss of Johnny Gaudreau, brother

By Adam Proteau- September 5, 2024

The tragedy that took the lives of Columbus Blue Jackets star winger Johnny Gaudreau and his brother, Matthew Gaudreau, have understandably hit the hockey world very hard.

At a media availability Wednesday, Blue Jackets staff and players tried to express their profound grief at the loss of the brothers.

"In talking to people in the organization...it is apparent just how special a person Johnny was, and how significant his loss is being felt by everyone," said Blue Jackets GM Don Waddell. "While there's a huge hole in our lineup, there's an even larger one in our hearts. Our immediate focus is on supporting the Gaudreau family, and supporting each other as we continue to grieve the loss of Johnny and Matthew."

Blue Jackets captain Boone Jenner said while he didn't know Matthew Gaudreau as well as his teammate, it's clear he and Johnny Gaudreau "shared an inseparable bond."

"In the past few days, moving through all the emotions – anger, sadness, disbelief and emptiness, I've come to realize how much love I have for John," Jenner said. "I'm very honored to be able to speak to what John meant, not only to me but all of his teammates and the positive impact he had on our lives."

It was clear from the press conference that navigating through this terrible time will be a team effort by the Blue Jackets.

Jenner, defensemen Erik Gudbranson and Zach Werenski and forward Sean Kuraly all were emotional as they spoke at the press conference Wednesday, and it was obvious how much Johnny and Matthew Gaudreau will be missed.

"They're each other's brothers, and these guys will do a tremendous job to help everybody through it," Waddell said.

Added Werenski: "We all know how much John and Matty meant to everyone, and while there will always be an empty feeling without them, I hope we can all find peace and comfort in knowing they've touched the lives of so many people."

Kuraly also shared more about Johnny Gaudreau's character.

"Good to the core, John leaves us a life's example of love, simplicity and joy," Kuraly said. "He expressed that for the masses through hockey, and personally through his relationships, which explains why he was universally adored in all the communities and lives that were lucky enough to enjoy No. 13. To say John will be missed doesn't completely capture it. May you and your brother Matt rest peacefully."

Waddell told media the team plans to travel together to attend the services for the Gaudreau brothers when the family announces details. But everyone Johnny and Matthew Gaudreau met – from their home state of New Jersey to Calgary, Columbus, Boston and all points in between – know they'll have to live with the grief that comes with losing two young men in the primes of their lives.

"I just want to say thank you, John, for choosing Columbus when other people wouldn't," said Werenski, referring to Johnny Gaudreau's decision to sign with the Blue Jackets as a free agent in 2022. "You brought so much joy and excitement to this city. I've never quite seen anything like it – something only truly special players can do, and that's what you were."

“I’ll always love and miss John so much, and I just want to say thank you, John, for letting me be a part of your life. It’s been so special to get to know him and his family firsthand, and while this pain will never go away, I think we can all find a little comfort knowing that Johnny and Matty lived life to the fullest every day.”

[The Washington Post / Loss of Johnny and Matthew Gaudreau leaves a 'hole in our hearts'](#)

By Cindy Boren, Glynn A. Hill and Des Bieler- September 5, 2024

Hockey fans, players and teams remembered Johnny Gaudreau of the Columbus Blue Jackets and Matthew Gaudreau on Wednesday, praising the love between the hockey loving brothers who were killed Aug. 29 when they were struck by a car as they rode bicycles in New Jersey.

"This is a heartbreak that words alone cannot heal," Blue Jackets captain Boone Jenner said at a candlelight vigil attended by hundreds of fans outside Nationwide Arena in Columbus. "That said, the support from you guys for us as a team and, most importantly, the Gaudreau family, has been incredible to see. ... As we continue to grieve together, let's continue sharing our incredible memories of John and Mattie. Let us keep their stories alive, hold them in our thoughts and keep them in our prayers.

"Nothing will fill the void in our hearts, but through our remembrance, we can find the strength to get through this difficult time together."

Earlier on Wednesday, Jenner and other members of the Blue Jackets organization offered tearful, touching remembrances at a news conference where they wore polo shirts with Johnny Gaudreau's No. 13. There, Jenner hailed Gaudreau as "truly one of a kind" whose pregame meals of "sauce-free pasta topped with butter and a Coke" always brought a reaction from new teammates. He praised Gaudreau as a family man and for the camaraderie he brought to the team. "We'll grieve, cry, and be vulnerable," he said, "but we'll persevere — because that's what John would've wanted."

The Gaudreau brothers were "taken in a cruel and senseless manner," Don Waddell, the Blue Jackets' president of hockey operations and general manager added at the news conference. "While there is a huge hole in our lineup, there's a bigger hole in our hearts."

Johnny, Waddell said, "played the game with joy. It's apparent just how special Johnny was, and how significantly his loss is felt by everyone."

The vigil included a moment of silence that last 13 minutes and 21 seconds, in honor of the brothers' jersey numbers. Johnny, who starred for Boston College and the Calgary Flames as well as the Blue Jackets, wore 13; Matthew, who played at BC and for multiple pro teams, wore 21. Nearly 2,000 miles away, the Flames were set to hold a memorial later in the evening at Calgary's Scotiabank Saddledome.

Among the fond memories shared by Columbus's Erik Gudbranson at the vigil was his penchant for giving the much smaller Gaudreau bear hugs. "I wouldn't let him down until he told me he loved me," said the 6-foot-5, 222-pound defenseman, "and he wouldn't tell me for a long time.

"But I know — up here, today — it was because he enjoyed the hugs," Gudbranson continued. "We just miss him so much."

As he had done at the news conference, Gudbranson also shared a plea for people to avoid driving while impaired.

"I beg you: Having fun is one thing, but please find a ride home," he told the crowd in Columbus. "There's no reason for a tragedy like this. There are so many options available to you."

The car that struck the brothers was driven by a man New Jersey State Police identified as Sean Higgins. He was charged Aug. 30 with two counts of vehicular homicide in the second degree and admitted to having five to six beers before the incident, according to a police affidavit.

Higgins is being held without bond pending a detention hearing Thursday.

"It's difficult to find the right words," Jenner said at the news conference. "[Johnny and Matthew] shared an inseparable bond. It was easy to see very quickly how tight-knit their family was. ... One thing that John never forgot is where he came from."

Another NHL player, Cole Caufield of the Montreal Canadiens, announced Tuesday that he would be changing his jersey number to 13 to honor Johnny, who was his teammate for Team USA at the 2024 IIHF World Championships in Prague.

"Getting to play with your hero is something that most people only dream of. I was lucky enough to be Johnny's teammate this past summer and it didn't take long to realize how great of a person he was," Caufield wrote of Johnny, an undersized, 5-9 star, in an Instagram post. "He was the most welcoming, genuine, and funniest guy I have ever met. He was someone everyone gravitated towards and I took every chance I could to be around him. Not only was he an amazing hockey player and teammate, but he was down to earth and truly cared about every person he encountered."

The Gaudreau brothers were to have been groomsmen at their sister's wedding, which was scheduled for Friday in Philadelphia. They were struck about 30 miles south of Philadelphia. Johnny was 31 and Matthew was 29.

"As we embark on the journey of laying John and Matty to rest, we are greatly comforted by all those who have visited these growing memorials and who have left messages of love, prayers, thoughts of kindness as well as jerseys, skates, sticks, pucks, flowers, candles and so many other tokens of remembrance," their uncle, Jim Gaudreau, wrote Tuesday on Facebook.

"We are consoled by the memorials on each of your doorsteps, in your yards and on your cars. We have heard and seen the countless moments of silence and heartfelt messages by so many professional athletes, organizations and other athletic leagues, by every single person in private, along with the extremely heartfelt messages from broadcasts, media and each and every single one of you along with the random acts of kindness and compassion by complete strangers."

In addition to their parents and extended family, Johnny is survived by his wife, Meredith, and two small children; Matthew's wife, Madeline, is pregnant with the couple's first child. A Go Fund Me campaign for Meredith and her unborn son has raised nearly \$600,000.

"We have been brought to our knees," the Gaudreau family's statement said, "but in that process we have witnessed and are reminded that we have been blessed with everything everyone has done for us through the lives John and Matty lived. We are gaining strength and WE WILL stand up once again. We are Gaudreau Strong!"